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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Africa funded a study to understand how government, donor, nongovernmental organization (NGO), and civil society representatives view the increasing role of NGOs in basic education in Africa. The study was carried out in Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali by the Support for Analysis and Research in Africa (SARA) Project and American Institutes for Research (AIR). Through literature reviews, field visits, and interviews, the study examined NGO interactions with donors and governments, as well as the role of NGOs in education policy and in civil society. Findings suggest factors in all these areas that should be considered to ensure that NGOs contribute most effectively to education development on the continent. (BT)

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Key Findings on the Role of NGOs in Basic Education in Africa

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Résultats de l'étude sur le rôle des ONG en éducation de base en Afrique

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United States Agency for International Development,
Bureau for Africa, Office of Sustainable Development

Creating Effective Partnership: Interactions Between Governments and NGOs in Basic Education in Africa

Involving Civil Society in Basic Education Improvement in Africa: The Role of NGOs

Dialogue and Negotiation: NGO-Donor Relationships in Basic Education in Africa

Improving Education Policy: The Growing Role of NGOs in Education in Africa

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Creating Effective Partnership: Interactions Between Governments and NGOs in Basic Education in Africa

Tension and mistrust often mark relations between governments and NGOs, even though they recognize that each has a role to improve basic education in Africa and can provide services that the other cannot. Government and NGOs have different, often conflicting, perspectives of each other's legitimate rights, role, capacity, and motivation, which often impede the development of a productive partnership.

This study of government-NGO relations in Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali* analyzes these conflicting perspectives and makes it clear that they will not disappear or be magically bridged. However, interviews with government officials and NGO representatives indicate that recognizing the differences and dealing with them can lead to improved partnership.

The Issue of Legitimacy: How Governments and NGOs View Themselves and Each Other

On the one hand, governments consider that it is their legitimate right and responsibility to control and regulate NGOs' role in education. The amount of space allowed to NGOs is determined by political considerations and by the contribution of NGOs to social and economic development. Governments attempt to regulate NGO work and legitimacy in basic education through three primary means:

- They require NGOs to register with the government. If an NGO becomes "legitimate" only through government approval, then the government can restrict or even prohibit NGOs from functioning. In Ethiopia and Malawi, NGOs report that the registration process is slow, difficult and expensive and thus favors larger and more-established NGOs. In contrast, the process is more streamlined in Mali, where the government must complete the registration within three months or an NGO is automatically registered.
- They define NGOs' areas of intervention. It could be by geographical area, with disadvantaged or remote sites likely to be where governments authorize NGOs to operate. Or it could by the scope or type of intervention. Governments in all four countries expressed preferences that NGOs conduct social mobilization efforts, train school committees, and provide supplies, rather than provide instruction themselves. They are willing to allow NGOs to grapple with such issues as community governance of schools and girls' education, issues in which the overextended public sector is sometimes stretched too thin to address. However, the quality of teaching and learning remains preserved on government grounds.
- Governments can set or enforce standards related to teacher qualifications, school construction, curriculum development, and other educational services that NGOs provide or have proposed to provide. In setting up community schools, for example, NGOs report that such standards limit who they can hire as teachers and what kinds of school buildings the government will allow them to construct.

On the other hand, many NGOs claim a legitimate right to provide education because they perceive that governments have failed to provide equitable access to quality education:

- NGOs supply education to underserved areas and communities where government does not reach.

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- NGOs supply communities and their leaders with resources in the form of leadership, governance, and management skills for improving education, and supply materials and equipment for school infrastructure and maintenance. NGOs help to establish school management committees and build their capacity so that communities can gain control of their own schools.

- NGOs support school teachers by providing learning materials and pre-service and in-service training.

These different stands on the role of NGOs and government can result in frictions, specifically when NGOs want to take on other activities that the government does not allow them to do. For instance, government officials expressed their annoyance with NGOs that go beyond the geographic area or type of activity that the government had ceded to them. Officials indicated that they, not NGOs, should determine what constitutes a legitimate educational role for NGOs.

Nonetheless, the objectives of governments and NGOs can be legitimate and complementary and lead to constructive partnership. For example, governments want NGOs to work with underserved groups because governments have difficulty doing so, and this is where NGOs feel the imperative to serve. Governments want NGOs to engage in community support activities; and most NGOs choose a community focus anyway.

The examples in the boxes show that partnerships between NGOs and government can be achieved with each party preserving its own legitimate role.

Honoring the Limits

In Malawi, the Centre for Creative Community Mobilization (CRECCOM) has consciously chosen to operate in ways that both preserve its legitimacy and will not elicit government opposition. This local NGO began its work with girls' education. Although it has expanded to tackle other issues beyond education, it maintains a community focus in keeping with government preferences. In addition, the NGO very consciously tries to allay government concerns through such tactics as inviting government participation in its events, keeping relevant ministries informed, and ensuring that its work complements and does not compete with government activity.

Partnership Perceptions

While recognizing that governments, donors, and NGOs often use the term "partnership" to define their mutual dependence, working together can benefit all. However, the different perceptions of the term illustrate how groups can work side by side with different assumptions. NGOs in Guinea defined partnership as providing technical and other resources to the government to bolster its participation in their programs. In Malawi and Ethiopia, government officials thought that partnerships imply that the government can define what NGOs do for them; NGOs have been able to negotiate and have allowed governments to take credit for successes. In Mali, government officials said they, not the NGOs, should take the lead in establishing the terms of a partnership, but for NGOs, partnership means that the government has accepted their prominent role in education.

Capacity: How Governments and NGOs View Each Other's Strengths and Weaknesses

NGOs' and governments' views of each other's capacities in education also affect their interactions. When NGOs look at government capacity, they say that governments are inefficient in providing access to quality education for all and have thus supported community schools to bridge this gap. Governments counter that their lack of progress stems from insufficient resources. In contrast, when governments look at NGO capacity in education, they state that NGOs cannot meet accepted educational standards and should not become involved in supplying education. NGOs respond by saying that the extreme circumstances in which they often work do not lend themselves to more traditional, government-sanctioned approaches.

The capacity issue emerges when NGOs engage in delivering services such as training and coaching teachers and developing curriculum and learning materials, as they now have done in all four countries. Government officials, vested in each country's standard system to prepare educators, view local NGOs as unqualified to teach, train others to teach, supervise teaching or develop curricula. Though governments are not thrilled about any NGO delivering services, they see international NGOs as having more relevant experience. However, they express dismay when they

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think that the international NGOs are not sufficiently supervising local programs, thus requiring the government to spend its resources to do so. The example below shows how one NGO, Save the Children, has adapted to circumstances to overcome the conflicting perceptions over capacity.

Motivation: Government Suspicions, NGO Frustrations

In all four countries, government officials questioned the motives of NGOs because of the financial considerations at stake. Malawian officials said that NGOs shift their areas of emphasis primarily in response to funding opportunities. Guinean officials stated that local NGOs were nothing more than private companies in disguise, while officials in Ethiopia worried about NGOs' hidden political agendas and lack of clarity as to whose and what interests NGOs claim to represent. Such suspicions lead government officials to monitor NGO activities through such means as requiring NGOs to prepare and submit reports on their programs and finances, making unannounced visits or inspections, or even taking over NGO activities.

Adapting Partnership Modes to Circumstances

Save the Children works in basic education in all four countries and has shaped its programs to adapt to different government standards and level of capacity. It began in Mali, using private funds to create schools in three communities that pioneered many new strategies: hiring local people (without formal teacher training) as teachers, developing curricula to focus on a few key areas of learning, and offering instruction in local languages. The program grew exponentially in Mali, and the NGO tried to apply the model in the other three countries. In each case, Save redefined its program in contexts shaped by government regulations as well as its own experience, the type of funding received, and the expertise of its local staff; then Save laid the foundation for constructive partnership to improve education.

In **Mali**, the community schools were set up to provide access to education in remote areas where no schools existed. In spite of initial government resistance, the program grew from three schools in 1991 to almost 800 by 2002. The rapid expansion resulted from pressure on the government to support the schools, on-going negotiations with government officials, donor funding, favorable publicity, and finally government recognition that these schools could help stretch tight public education budgets. Government standards for community schools were established as a result of the Save experience and community schools obtained an official legal status.

In **Malawi**, the issue from the start was quality. The model used in Mali to expand access conflicted with government standards regarding curriculum, teacher training, and school construction. Thus, instead of increasing access and expanding the number of schools as it did in Mali, Save the Children in Malawi instead focused on quality, developed an experimental curriculum and conformed to government standards for teacher training. Under the government scrutiny, the Save curriculum and teacher training practices are currently being examined and tested as a potential means of improving the quality of schooling nationally.

In **Guinea**, the government rejected the community school model that Save had used in Mali—specifically the use of untrained teachers, an abridged curriculum, and low cost school construction. After a long period of negotiations, the government agreed that Save would adopt a model that provided support to parents associations to manage, supply and maintain the schools rather than trespass on government domain (teacher training and curriculum). Save, however, succeeded in having the Ministry accept and honor some of its preconditions, such as ensuring that trained teachers be supplied to the schools.

In **Ethiopia**, Save focuses on supporting innovative approaches to education in areas where the government has not reached out. Rather than try to supply educational services as it has done in the other three countries, Save is strengthening 10 local NGOs to become major education actors in the future. Save offers support and guidance to these NGOs in such areas as capacity building, networking, and negotiating with the government. However the NGOs are classified as providing non-formal education. As a result of this compromise, few conflicts over government standards have arisen.

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NGOs consider one of their most important contributions to education as their capacity to innovate, identify problems, and test solutions. In turn, they expressed frustration with governments' incapacity to do so. Although governments may say that they would experiment if they had the resources, the fact is that political and systemic realities are formidable obstacles to innovation. Education ministries take a national approach; when they pilot new strategies, they must disperse test sites to satisfy many constituencies. In contrast, NGO programs examined in this study usually began as specific experiments in small sites. Although government officials both insist upon and complain that NGOs operate in only a small part of the country, this actually frees up an NGO to start small.

NGOs and government can find common ground when both consider adopting and scaling up an innovation. Going to scale takes a variety of forms, adapting the model to other sets of circumstances, experimenting with different strategies, identifying new problems to solve, or fulfilling donor requests to replicate the model elsewhere (not always desired, since each site is unique). To have a fighting chance, however, NGOs must devote resources to evaluate and demonstrate their results in ways that resonate with governments and with donors. For instance, when the government is engaged in the evaluation itself, rather than filtered through an NGO, mutual understanding can be achieved and inform education decisions made collaboratively.

As governments and NGOs learn more about what each is doing, the mistrust will not magically disappear, but it can be managed. In all four countries, relations were best between NGOs and local officials with whom they come in regular contact, rather than with the more distant central government. The following box illustrates a successful collaboration between NGOs and Ministry of Education in Ethiopia.

Familiarity Breeds Respect

Of the four countries studied, Ethiopia exercises the tightest control over NGO activities. In fact, for many years, the only acceptable role for NGOs was in temporary emergency relief. Over time, NGOs in Ethiopia have made progress in assuaging government concerns, and the government has taken steps to improve relations with NGOs.

For example, regional education staff often showed up unannounced to World Learning projects. But, over time, they were always welcomed, they liked what they saw, and the NGO also took care to include government staff in workshops and other events. Local NGOs in different regions report similar experiences. The Rift Valley Children and Women's Association, for example, gained the confidence of their local education bureau by keeping them well-informed and involved. In some cases, international NGOs have arranged for government staff to visit successful NGO programs and assisted local NGOs in improving their monitoring and reporting skills.

Gradually, the government has included NGOs in its planning. Some regional bureaus now take NGO activities into account when they plan school construction; another bureau instituted a policy to ease the transfer of students from NGO-run to public schools. On the national level, the Ministry of Education researched alternative education programs and found them effective. Conducting the research itself, rather than relying only on NGO descriptions, led the Ministry to encourage more NGO involvement in education.

Ethiopia's is a story of small but steady steps, in which the government has made the effort to examine NGO experiments and NGOs have worked to demonstrate the value of their activities. Through communication and exposure, a suspicious stand-off evolved to a relationship of greater collaboration and respect.

Consider This

Across the four countries, NGOs and governments report a similar evolution in their interactions towards building partnership: from mutual suspicion to investigation and negotiations, to acceptance and support.

- Governments and NGOs need to recognize that they hold different perspectives based on dissimilar sets of beliefs, but that they can build constructive partnerships to improve access to and quality of education.
- NGOs and government need to develop a collaborative consultative process to outline the roles and responsibilities of NGOs in the education sector. They can identify, learn from, and pursue effective partnership mechanisms.
- NGOs and governments need to establish effective lines of communication. To do so NGOs need to

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increase government exposure to innovations and accomplishments. Familiarity with programs and results breeds trust, which shows to have a positive effect on the interactions between NGOs and governments.

- Governments need to incorporate the value-added of innovations into their policies and practices and encourage the participation of NGOs in policy formulation and change. If governments are only willing to accept that NGOs work in areas where they cannot or do not want to commit resources, then the result is less effective than a collaborative effort that would affect the education system as a whole.

Involving Civil Society in Basic Education Improvement in Africa: The Role of NGOs

Donors and governments support the role of NGOs in developing civil society, although for different reasons than those envisioned by the NGOs themselves. While NGOs working in education hope that that their work at the community and school level will have a broad societal influence, donors, and especially governments, have more limited and pragmatic objectives.

This study of NGOs in Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali* looks at why and how NGOs working in education strengthen civil society to improve the provision and quality of education services. They do so through changing community attitudes and expectations for more and better education, building the institutional strength of local NGOs, and supporting NGO networks to engage in advocacy for education. For each of these strategies, lessons are drawn on how NGOs really affect civil society to improve the delivery and quality of education services.

Why do NGOs Want to Strengthen Civil Society?

The international NGOs, donors, and governments who provided information for this study, all support the development of civil society to improve basic education, at least at the local level, and the contribution that NGOs can make to this development. But to what end?

International NGOs working in education see that their role in strengthening civil society is achieved through empowerment, in which people's abilities to achieve their human rights and exert demands on the state are enhanced. Some see civil society development as the means to achieve the larger goal of establishing and maintaining democracy; others see it as a means to the end of improving education. In any event, they note that building the capacity of citizens to form networks of responsibilities and increasing local involvement in education institutions will result in stronger education systems.

Donors see that NGOs' role in strengthening civil society can lead to democratization, since the nature of democratic systems calls for broad-based participation. In fact, donors have increased their funding to NGOs in part because of their sustainable links to communities for program implementation, and because of the participatory development process championed by NGOs to build a democratic society capable of providing access to quality education.

Governments see that NGOs' role in strengthening civil society will help citizens take greater responsibility for improving their lives and create modern institutions—media, unions, professional associations—which can reduce the burden of the state in providing services and promote economic development. They believe that NGO activities will increase community contribution of resources to education, which can compensate for low education sector investments. Governments also assume that NGO efforts to strengthen civil society should remain at the local level, while international NGOs believe that linking and strengthening local NGOs will give them a stronger national voice.

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What NGOs Are Doing in Education to Strengthen Civil Society

Changing Attitudes

NGOs empower communities to advocate for better educational services and to accomplish such goals as increased access to education, especially for girls, and improved management of schools, using a variety of participatory approaches. In so doing communities recognize their abilities to identify and solve their own problèms, to act as an organized social unit and to put in place the basic conditions to deliver better education services to their children. However, while NGOs use participatory methods to empower communities, they also tend to retain decision-making power and use participatory methods to achieve their own goals. Nonetheless, all partners agreed that one of the most important successes of NGOs working in education has been increased access to schooling and active local community involvement in the quality of education.

The box illustrates how two NGOs in Ethiopia used different strategies to involve communities in providing education. Both were successful, but had different focuses: one was on increasing access, the other on quality.

Creating Expectations

Changed attitudes may result in new or increased expectations for more or better education. In Mali, where World Education and Save the Children have made the creation of viable civil society organizations an objective of their education programs, community expectations have proven challenging to meet. When Save encouraged communities to take ownership of their community schools, they did to such an extent that they opposed Save's plans to move their children out of the schools after four years so that others could attend. World Education's efforts to build parents' associations led to new demands for classrooms, teachers and textbooks. Successful community mobilization has led to an increase in demand for better education, which outstrips community's capacity to meet this demand. Community schools have transformed the way citizens relate to education as their demands coalesce into pressure on the State for better education services. Fundamentally, the vehicle of community schools has helped create a civil society lobby for education.

Building Schools or Building a School Community?

Whether an NGO seeks to build community organizations as a means to achieve specific educational outcomes or more long-term capacity of communities to support schools affects how it designs and implements its projects. In Ethiopia, a look at two different regions and two different NGOs illustrates this distinction. In the Tigray Region, the Tigray Development Association (TDA) worked with school management committees to offer community financial and labor support to government schools. In the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, World Learning looked upon its work with school management committees as building community participation in decision making and management.

These distinctions in strategies manifested themselves in how the two NGOs developed criteria to award grants to schools. TDA used a three-level grant system, with increased enrollment rates, reduced dropout rates, and reduced repetition rates to determine which schools would receive the largest grants. Community participation meant contribution of money and labor. In contrast, World Learning used grants to motivate organizations to prepare strategic plans, establish codes of ethics, and other more qualitative accomplishments. Community participation meant involvement in school management and decision making.

Ultimately NGOs and communities *together* need to define their long term goals and thus their strategies, for supporting local education services.

Building Organization

Just as education becomes a subject around which communities can organize, the organization that they create to accomplish educational tasks can provide a sustainable structure through which they make demands known to authorities. Through their work with school committees and parents' associations, NGOs can give communities the skills to run effective organizations. Nevertheless, training school committees or parents' organizations does not necessarily make them community representatives; NGOs express concerns that the organizations only represent the elite, or are

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gender-biased, or that they are too inclusive of government staff. Gradually however, local NGOs are learning to facilitate the establishment of more democratic decision making structures without upsetting traditional village leadership. As a result, in Mali, World Education supported a process of re-election of community representatives, which resolved the issue of equitable representation.

Creating Networks

In all four countries, international NGOs have tried to help local NGOs build linkages and form networks, although these networks have generally not had the substantive impact that perhaps was envisioned at their creation.

- In Ethiopia, Save the Children and Pact took the lead in creating the Basic Education Network (BEN), a network of NGOs working in education. However, BEN is not registered with the government, which curtails its impact.

- In Mali, the Groupe Pivot is a consortium of NGOs that was active first in information exchange and then in policy work. However, its effectiveness declined when members strayed from their core purpose.

- In Malawi, the Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education takes a confrontational stance toward the government; the NGO-Government Alliance for Basic Education began when some Coalition members wanted a more conciliatory stance and closer relationship with the government. In part as a result of the Coalition's tactics, the government instituted a third network, the Council for Non-Government Organizations, which it controls and requires NGOs to join.

This array of different experiences with NGO networks and alliances run from government-created umbrella organizations to NGO networks that may or may not include government, and they range from confrontation to collaboration. In all cases they aim at making the voice of civil society heard in the public arena to reach the same goal of improving education.

Can Community Strengthening "Trickle Up"?

While numerous examples of accomplishment are found in individual communities, NGOs have not been as successful in the next step—assisting communities and local NGOs to strengthen their links upward or outward to other organizations so that, together, they can be influential at a regional or national level. NGOs generally work in communities as if they were isolated entities to be made self-sufficient, rather than as part of a network of social organizations. The assumption that building local capacity will inevitably lead to a stronger national voice for the people does not reflect what has occurred to date in the four countries studied.

Nonetheless, changes in participation, expectations, and organization can generate demands that force communities to construct their own links to the larger society. In Ethiopia, World Learning has encouraged communities to seek funding from other organizations and Action Aid has organized an education committee of NGOs to interact with district officials. The benefits of community strengthening trickle up when connections are made to help build civil society from the bottom up.

Strengthening Civil Society through Local NGOs

The study brought to light the common assumption held by donors and international NGOs that stronger local NGOs strengthen civil society; that supporting local NGOs' involvement in education will increase the relevance and sustainability of sector programs. If this civil society goal is a priority, then how large NGOs and donors choose to engage local NGOs becomes an issue. International NGOs and donors can either sub-contract with local NGOs to implement small components of larger projects or can support them as they develop or continue their own programs and services. Many of the NGO representatives interviewed in this study felt that funding a local NGO's own endeavors more likely increases its capacity and long-term sustainability than hiring an NGO to complete a pre-determined task. Staff of CRECCOM, a Malawian NGO that began as part of a USAID project before becoming independent, drew attention to the advantages of setting its own priorities rather than only implementing those of USAID. In Ethiopia, local NGOs are receiving support to carry out their own education projects, rather than serving as sub-contractors.

In each country, local NGO support for civil society in the education sector has taken a different path:

In Mali, except for the Groupe Pivot network, efforts have been focused at the community level. Local NGOs have primarily been tapped as sub-contractors to implement projects, with little deliberate effort to strengthen them to be more active players in civil society. The sheer force and numbers of community schools has changed community expectations, however, which has turned them into powerful advocates for demanding services from the government.

In Guinea, too, local NGOs focus on community strengthening. However, the government's decision on how to implement a large World Bank-financed school construction project may have long-term implications for the role of NGOs in the country and, more broadly, for civil society. The decision was made to channel the work through national NGOs; as a result, local NGOs have proliferated and successfully carried out the projects assigned to them. Their numbers and the reputation they are gaining could turn them into a force for civil society, bridging the gap between communities and government.

In Ethiopia, regional decentralization and government controls on NGOs encourage small, contained local programs, rather than pilot projects that can then be scaled up. International NGOs, often operating with private, non-donor funding, such as the Banyan Tree Foundation, are working to strengthen local NGOs both to build civil society and improve education. Save the Children builds the capacity of local education NGOs to learn about basic education content as well as organizational skills.

In Malawi, the government has controlled how NGOs work in the education sector and is particularly opposed to the community school models that operate elsewhere in Africa. Despite or because of this control, it is noteworthy that Malawi is the only country studied in which some degree of adversarial advocacy by NGOs has emerged.

Finding the resources necessary to build the capacity of local NGOs in education has been difficult. In USAID programs, these components are financed with democracy and governance funds rather than education funds.

What emerges as consistent across the four countries is that local organizations cannot serve only as structures for civil society. They must have real reasons to exist and tasks to accomplish. For instance, capacity building for local parents associations is successful when they have a grant to manage or an agreed upon set of responsibilities to carry out. Local NGOs become strong when they define their own programs rather than operate as contractors. NGO networks have gotten strong when they have advocated for specific policy changes.

Consider This

- Local and international NGOs, as well as donors and governments need to create a space for sharing information, resolving issues, and finding solutions related to shared and respective roles in improving education through civil society strengthening.
- Communication lines need to be identified to ensure on-going dialogue between international NGOs and local NGOs, as well as other representative civil groups on specific roles related to education issues.
- International NGOs need to assist local NGOs to define their own programs and priorities, not just carry out the work defined by others as sub-contractors. Similarly, NGO networks need to have specific missions or causes around which to advocate to be effective and sustainable.
- NGOs need to be clear as to what and whose interests they are representing. They need to assist communities to create links and alliances upward and outward with other civil society organizations and with governments.
- Donors need to recognize the need to build local NGOs' capacity and to fund this development component as a means to anchor local management and community ownership of education services, and thus ensure the sustainability of their programs.

Dialogue and Negotiation: NGO-Donor Relationships in Basic Education in Africa

Donors are increasing their funding to NGOs to design and implement basic education programs in Africa. The advantage to donors is that NGOs often operate in ways that neither they nor host governments can, especially at the community level. For NGOs, the advantage is new or additional funding to sustain or scale up their programs. However, the donor-NGO relationship also implies trade-offs and negotiations, based on the different expectations and parameters under which each operates.

This study of NGO involvement in education in Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali* examines why donors say they increasingly turn to NGOs, how donors and NGOs interact and negotiate with each other, and the consequences of these interactions for both groups. Through dialogue and negotiation, donors and NGOs can find effective strategies to integrate NGOs' knowledge of the grassroots and donor-supported education agenda.

Defining the Agenda in Donor-NGO Relationships

Historically, NGOs developed education initiatives with their own resources and then approached donors for resources to maintain or expand them, as occurred, for example, with Save the Children and World Education in Mali, and with Aide et Action in Guinea. When donors recognized the value added of NGOs' innovations in education, they approached the NGOs to expand or develop similar programs. In recent years, relations between donors and NGOs have become more formal and donors have taken more control. In the four countries studied, donors are found to be more likely to define the education agenda, have NGOs compete for resources, and use them as contractors.

NGO programs have been shaped by the type of funding mechanisms set by donors. NGOs are funded through three main mechanisms: (1) a donor issues a Request for Proposals in which NGOs compete to implement the donor-specified project; (2) a donor and NGO negotiate a one-on-one contract or agreement because of the NGO's particular expertise; or (3) a donor finances local NGOs via contracts with international or well-established national NGOs.

Because NGOs are more often used by donors as contractors, most government and other stakeholders are suspicious of NGO motivations: they may be seen to carry out donor agendas that may not be in line with the government agenda, as is shown by the following example.

Who Are They?

Sometimes NGOs' motivations for undertaking a donor-financed project are viewed suspiciously. In Guinea, for example, government interviewees said they thought that the leaders of some local NGOs were involved in these projects for their own enrichment or political gain. Several government officials made a distinction between NGOs who rely on donor resources and those who seek funding elsewhere—and said that the former were "nothing more than contractors."

Using NGOs to Implement Donor Programs: The Need for Results

Donors continue to support systemic education reform in the public sector by funding curriculum development, teacher training programs, textbook production, and other institutional capacity needs.

* The Bureau for Africa of the U.S. Agency for International Development funded a study to understand how government, donor, NGO, and civil society representatives view the increasing role of NGOs in basic education in Africa. The study was carried out in Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali by the Support for Analysis and Research in Africa (SARA) Project. Through literature reviews, field visits, and interviews, the study examined NGO interactions with donors (the subject of this brief) and with governments, as well as the role of NGOs in education policy and in civil society (covered in other briefs in this series). The research suggests factors in all these areas that should be considered to ensure that NGOs contribute most effectively to education development on the continent. The full study is available from the SARA Project, http://sara.aed.org.

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Yet, in interviews conducted for this study, donors said they turn to NGOs to implement education programs for the following reasons, all of which enhance donors' agendas:

- NGOs achieve more measurable and cost effective results than governments do. Donors feel that NGOs' costs tend to be lower than a government's, and that NGOs can meet deadlines better. In Guinea, for example, local NGOs built twice the number of schools as the government did with the same budget and met almost all construction deadlines.

- NGOs can more easily work at a local level to mobilize communities to support schools than can governments. Most governments no longer work directly with communities in the education sector. Mali's community schools and Ethiopia's community-focused programs are two examples in which NGOs have mobilized support for education where previously no or few educational opportunities existed.

- NGOs are easier to negotiate with than governments and easier to draw up contracts and agreements with than the private, for-profit sector. NGOs do not have to contend with the bureaucracy, politics, and other realities of the public sector. And both local government's and the donor's own laws and regulations often favor dealing with a nonprofit organization over a for-profit company or consortium of companies. This preference has given rise to suspicion of NGO motivations on the part of some government officials, as seen in Guinea.

- NGOs are often already working in other sectors within the country or in education programs in other countries in the region. Thus, the donor benefits from an NGO's already-established presence and relationships. Save the Children, for example, works in all four countries included in this study.

- NGOs have pioneered innovations in education, which donors now regularly incorporate into program design, such as community schools and more participatory teaching and learning methodologies.

- NGOs are more closely allied to civil society (for example, in their work with parents' associations) than are government or the for-profit sector. They thus represent an opportunity for synergy as donors attempt to address simultaneously democracy and governance and educational objectives.

Using Donor Funds to Implement NGO Programs

Donor funding usually comes with restrictions, expectations, or other strings attached (as, from a donor point of view, it should). The most important constraints concern financial and management requirements. NGOs must meet donor demands for accountability, often defined through donor-required financial and programmatic reports. While accountability is important, NGO representatives say they expend significant resources on reporting, with some estimating that they spend from 10 to 25 percent of their time on USAID reporting requirements alone. Practically speaking, this limits which NGOs can accept funding—smaller or newer ones do not have the capacity or resources to comply with USAID and many other donors' requirements.

Aside from the time and resources involved, programmatic reporting has an impact on a project's development or evolution. If a donor is looking for a particular result for which it will be held accountable (e.g., the number of female school drop-outs), the need to show progress toward achieving this result serves to orient the objectives and resources of the NGO's programs. In many instances, donor demands absorb more resources than those allocated for the specific project. The box illustrates the impact that donors' administrative requirements have on NGOs programs and how they were addressed.

Unintended Consequences of Donor Funding

In general, donors have already anticipated their results before the NGO is even selected, much less begins work. While this clarity helps ensure that donors are more accountable to their own constituents, it means that NGOs have less leeway to experiment than in more flexible funding arrangements.

Donors' reliance on intermediaries (usually international or large national NGOs) to work with small, local NGOs also has pluses and minuses. Donors want to fund on-the-ground organizations, but do not have the administrative capacity to supervise many local NGOs (nor do these small NGOs have the administrative

Reporting Realities

USAID reporting requirements tend to favor international NGOs over local and most national NGOs. The international NGOs have developed systems to comply with the requirements, which they can transfer to their various field offices. Their expatriate staff are often already familiar with the requirements and been trained in how to respond to them. In contrast, even well-established national NGOs may have difficulty dealing with them. In Malawi, CRECCOM reported that in the early stages of its relationship with USAID, they received money on a monthly basis and could not get the next month's funding until they had accounted for the money spent. Because money could not be carried over from one month to another, CRECCOM fell behind in its implementation schedule, which led to more implementation problems and difficulty in reporting. Over time, USAID gathered evidence about CRECCOM's financial management and made the process easier.

capacity to satisfy donor reporting requirements). Thus, economies of scale ease the donors' management burden and allow these NGOs to get funding they might not get otherwise. However, it also sets up a structure in which an intermediary filters relations between donors and implementing NGOs.

Working through NGOs raises the question of who will continue as donor-financed, NGO-implemented projects end. Unlike an NGO, a government is essentially a permanent institution. Yet, if the government has not been involved in a donor-financed project, it is likely not invested in the project's continuation, nor is the community alone likely to shoulder the burden.

As a point of comparison, it is useful to look at NGOs, such as Save the Children, CARE, Plan International, and Action Aid, that get limited donor financing for their education activities. NGO programs that are not donor-financed tend to differ from donor-financed NGO programs in two ways:

- Because they are not held to an explicit contract with defined deliverables, independently financed NGOs tend to have more fluid and flexible programs, and their field offices have more autonomy. Although they do have monitoring and evaluation systems and links with their headquarters, Action Aid and CARE, as just two examples, report wide differences and autonomy among their country programs. As a result, these NGOs tend to develop more process-oriented projects that aim to develop relationships or build institutional capacity rather than achieve specific educational results.

- Because they are not operating under a fixed project time frame, independently financed NGOs tend to design projects without an explicit exit strategy or end point. As they meet one objective, they may well develop others. These NGOs often seek a long-term presence in a community or region, rather than the fixed time limit of a contract. It allows for better and sustainable collaboration with governments and stakeholders.

Negotiating the Differences

NGOs and donors have tried to find common grounds through an on-going process of dialogue, negotiations and adjustments to each other's needs. Typically, negotiations revolve around four issues: scope, cost, agenda, and exit strategy.

- **Scope:** NGOs usually estimate conservatively what they can accomplish in terms of the number of sites served, locations, or the extent of the intervention. They do not want to stretch themselves too thin. In contrast, donors want their resources to have the largest impact possible and may be over-optimistic about how much can be accomplished. In Mali, for example, international NGO representatives said that donors pressured them to scale up their community programs more than they felt they could handle well. However, NGOs did adjust their program to make them go to scale and significantly increase access to education resulting in an additional 160,000 children enrolled in primary schools.

- **Costs:** Donors fund the activities and results that meet their program objectives, while NGOs are looking for support of their broader development vision. Although donors may share this vision, it's not one they necessarily want to or can finance with specific project funds. In addition, NGOs seek funding to cover overhead and other costs, not just specific project expenses. International NGOs' role in strengthening local NGOs and building their capacity is often thwarted by donors' funding restrictions: education programs funds usually do

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not include a civil society capacity building component. Local NGOs, more so than international NGOs, report difficulty in getting donor funding in this regard. Representatives of national NGOs in Guinea and Mali indicated that donor refusal to underwrite development or overhead costs limited their potential for survival. The issue is still unresolved.

- **Agenda:** Donors and NGOs may have differing technical agendas, even when they share the same objectives. For instance World Education in Mali consistently defined its program as aiming to reinforce civil society while its donor financed this program to improve learning in schools and increase access to education. This led to serious disagreements regarding the priorities and content of the program. The issue was solved with the NGO finding funds from another source and the donor, USAID in this case, capitalizing on synergies between its democracy and governance and education programs. This resulted in a successful integrated approach to education.

- **Exit Strategy:** Donors have a clear end point when they budget for and finance a project. NGOs usually operate with an open-ended, long-term presence in a community or region. However, while most agencies cannot commit funds for a period longer than five years, both partners in the field have often been able to dialogue and donors have creatively used different funding mechanisms to sustain NGO-supported education programs between contracts.

Donor support of NGO programs has made a significant contribution to basic education in Africa. And, the reality is that most NGOs need donor resources to carry out their educational activities in Africa. An NGO must be willing to accept the strings—albeit negotiating with the donor on terms that will optimally satisfy the needs of both. Local and national NGOs must be willing to learn the lessons that international NGOs learned some time ago—to be taken seriously by donors, it is necessary to be very professional and comply with demands for accountability.

Consider This

- Donors and NGOs have an unequal relationship based on resources. However, most NGOs need donor resources, and most donors want to support the benefits that NGOs can bring to their projects. If an NGO wants to pursue donor resources, it must be willing to accept the accountability, needs and other demands that donors have tied to their funding. If a donor wants to work with an NGO, the pressure for results should not overshadow the experimentation and potential innovations that NGOs have brought to the education sector.

- Although they share such broad goals as improved educational access and quality, donors and NGOs need to acknowledge their differences in strategy and intermediate objectives and consider them when the two groups decide to work toward a common goal.

- Donors and NGOs need to weigh the cost of contractual restrictions against performance of the education program.

- Donors should consider supporting capacity building of local NGOs through international NGOs.

- When confusion over NGO roles and identity arises, donors can help to identify and use mechanisms to improve the quality of partnership between government and NGOs.

- Donors need to work more closely with NGOs before determining their own education agenda to take into account the local knowledge of the grassroots that will inevitably lay the foundations for the success of the program.

Improving Education Policy: The Growing Role of NGOs in Education in Africa

NGOs are finding that sustainable education programs in Africa often require changes in education policy. This realization has propelled them to try to change policies that hamper their work or seek new policies that would enhance it. In so doing, many NGOs have gone a step further, from trying to change specific policies to focusing on the policy process itself.

This study of the role of NGOs in basic education in Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali* highlights how international and some national NGOs have engaged in concerted and explicit efforts to change education policy. This brief looks at why and how they attempt this; how governments, donors, and other stakeholders view their attempts; what has contributed to their successes and failures; and what lessons have been learned.

Defining Policy for This Study

Policy is defined as a set of mandatory directives that regulate decisions. This study looked at policy in a particular context: the attempts by NGOs to influence education policy above the school and community level. It looked at policy content and how it is enforced by government officials, although not how it is interpreted within schools and communities.

Why do NGOs Want to Influence Education Policy?

NGOs cite two main motivations for their policy work:

Out of necessity: NGOs find that they need specific actions and policies from the government to ensure the success of their programs. In no case did NGOs start their programs with the objective of changing education policy. In Mali, for example, NGOs did not plan to get involved in education policy when they launched the community school concept. But the government's refusal to allow community-school students to transfer into formal primary or secondary schools threatened the long-term viability of these NGO-operated schools. After a concerted effort, NGOs were successful in changing policy when the President issued a decree that allowed these students to take government exams and sanctioned government officials to supervise quality and provide resources to the community schools.

To promote public participation in education decision-making: NGOs are interested in changing the policy process to ensure that the public is treated as clients of education services. Policies need to be set with the involvement of communities and implemented and assessed with public oversight. At the school level, World Education strengthens parents' associations or school committees in Guinea and Mali so that, as democratic grassroots organizations, they can advocate for more accountability from local authorities. At the national level, NGOs support federations of civil groups so that they can interact directly with central authorities on policy.

Although NGOs can point to numerous successes in influencing policies and even creating mechanisms to increase their impact on policy, finding the formula to change the education policy process that can lead to policy change has proven to be difficult. Nonetheless, different approaches have been tried, as shown in the above box, which have led to changing the policy process.

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Entering from Different Angles

Many approaches to NGOs' policy work exist, as seen in the four countries. One decision that NGOs take is at what level of the system they think their involvement will make a difference. In Mali and Guinea, World Education has focused on strengthening parents' associations through training and helping to create federations of local associations. In Malawi, Action Aid, Oxfam, and CARE have taken a national-level approach, participating in the Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education, which is composed of national and international NGOs and other civil society groups. Rather than focus on local organizations spreading their influence "up" to the central level, the Malawian example shows a centrally organized coalition looking to influence national policy and how it is implemented on the ground.

Should NGOs be Education Policy Advocates?

Government officials, donors, and other education stakeholders expressed different perspectives about the increasing role of NGOs in the policy process. These perspectives create both constraints and opportunities for NGOs as they engage in policy change.

Governments

Most government officials interviewed for this study considered policy areas to be off limits for NGOs. In Ethiopia, Guinea, and Malawi, government officials described NGOs as implementers of government policy, not formulators of it. They appreciate the role that NGOs can play in social mobilization at the community level, but not that NGOs might mobilize communities to demand accountability from the government above the school level. In Mali however, with ten years of NGO activity in the education sector, government officials have accepted that NGOs can and should play a role in policy formation.

Most government officials were not aware of NGO efforts to change the policy process, only specific policies. They see NGOs' social mobilization as strengthening schools and improving education indeed—but do not connect these efforts with having an impact on policy above the school level. Furthermore, most government officials do not distinguish between the policy agenda of donors and that of donor-financed NGOs. Whether it is actually the case or not, NGOs are seen as an extension of donor programs who advance donor-preferred policy agendas.

That said, the study shows that government and NGOs are learning to work side by side. In fact, when governments claim that NGOs have no role in policy, they *de facto* are involved. Time plays a role: as NGOs become more integrated in the education sector of a given country, it becomes more difficult to exclude them. In addition, familiarity breeds trust: as NGOs and government officials work together on various issues, they get to know one another and increase their communications about policies and other issues affecting education. The size of the NGO and its programs also plays a role: where NGOs are strong and provide an essential service and when the government is weak, NGOs find that their leverage to influence policies increases.

Perceptions are evolving and partnerships are now forming. Governments in the four countries covered by this study have all invited NGOs to participate in policy deliberations at some level. In Ethiopia, for example, which exercises the tightest control on NGOs, the Ministry of Education has allowed NGOs to join in discussions to consider policy changes related to non-formal schooling. Such events provide the space for NGOs to advocate for policy change in collaboration with government officials.

Donors

In general, donors and NGOs share the same educational goals. In fact, when they are aligned to change a particular policy, they form a powerful alliance. In Guinea, USAID and Save the Children successfully worked toward changes in teacher deployment that would affect NGO-operated rural schools. However, donor representatives interviewed for this study had little tolerance when an NGO pursues a separate policy agenda with their funding. When the issue arises, donors can easily leverage a re-alignment.

Donors have focused on specific education policy agendas rather than on the NGOs' efforts to change the policy process. However, the source of funding can influence the nature of the policy work conducted by NGOs. For example, USAID education sector obligations have only allowed NGOs to work on specific education policy agendas that may result in direct educational outcomes. But funding from USAID's democracy and governance program have enabled

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World Education in Mali and Pact in Ethiopia, for example, to engage non-governmental actors in the policy process, thus supporting broader, process-oriented policy objectives. The improved policy process has led to increased local participation in education decision making, resulting in better management and performance of schools.

Local Stakeholders

Although community representatives and local officials understand the role that NGOs play in local decisions, they viewed national-level policy as distant and were not aware of what NGOs did on a national level. Interestingly, NGOs are seeking changes ostensibly on behalf of these local stakeholders, but these stakeholders are not engaged in or even aware of their efforts at the national level.

This illustrates a weak link in the paradigm that drives NGO interest in changing both policies and the policy process. To what extent do the participatory processes that NGOs advocate truly engage the public in policy deliberations? Do the different mechanisms put in place really communicate the preferences of community members and civil society to decision makers—or are these positions really those of the NGOs that are sponsoring efforts to create the mechanisms? Ultimately, changing policy entails changing the policy process so that the public understands, participates, and can influence education policy. Although NGOs have created links will all actors, including grassroots stakeholders, they have so far failed to develop mechanisms that link these actors altogether in an effective manner. The importance of trying to influence the policy process is a priority.

Teachers Unions and Other Civil Society Groups

Teachers unions, in particular, as well as religious groups, political parties, and other organizations are not usually part of NGOs' policy change efforts, but they have views that make them potentially strong opponents or allies.

In Guinea and Mali, teachers' union representatives view NGOs as attempting to undo the public education system. They said that NGOs have no legitimacy to work in education and, by extension, in education policy. Although NGO and union representatives attend some of the same meetings, they have no relations, which leads to misperceptions and distrust. Teachers' union opposition has not affected NGO work in Mali and Guinea—yet. However, this opposition looms as a potential constraint. In Malawi, on the other hand, NGOs invited the teachers union to enter their coalition, in part because they all share a goal of seeking better conditions and pay for teachers. Over time, this relationship will be interesting to observe in terms of its affect on policy change.

How NGOs Attempt to Influence Policy

NGOs have used the following policy strategies to influence education policy:

Policy dialogue: By engaging in ongoing discussions with policy makers to reach a consensus, ideally informed by objective data and analysis, NGOs try to create an atmosphere of partnership to solve a problem or come to consensus. For example, in Guinea, Aide et Action has chosen to engage in policy dialogue by participating in meetings with donors and with national education authorities.

Coalition building: NGOs seek to create coalitions based on the premise that there is strength in numbers. In Mali, for example, the creation of the Groupe Pivot, a consortium of NGOs, proved extremely important to push forward the community school policy agenda. However, limitations to the effectiveness of coalitions may emerge. After the Groupe Pivot obtained the changes it sought, it took on a new role as a clearinghouse for donors. But its leadership dispersed after its original mission was met, and the coalition waned in effectiveness. In Malawi, NGOs and other civil society organizations came together in the Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education, but eventually disagreed about how adversarial the coalition should be in its relations with the government. This eventually caused the coalition to split into two.

Using donors to leverage policy: As noted above, NGO-donor convergence on an issue is powerful, in part because the donors have resources to support their policy objectives. In Ethiopia, for example, when an NGO received donor funding for education, the region in which it operated would receive a correspondingly smaller amount from the government. Regional officials, to guard their allocations, impeded NGOs from getting funding. When a World Learning project was held up for a year, USAID convened a meeting with education officials and offered an incentive fund to offset the resources that a regional education bureau would lose. Thus the donor and the NGO joined forces to change a policy.

Leveraging change through resources: NGO-supported sponsorship and rural development programs bring additional human and financial resources to education that would not be there otherwise. In Mali and Guinea, where NGOs receive a large percentage of the external funds going into education, the size of the NGO programs results in a powerful voice and policy leverage. In Mali, for example, community schools enroll approximately 25 percent of all children. In Guinea, Plan International supports schools in every district of the N'zérékouré region and provides support to almost every local government in the region.

Providing an example: Evidence of the effectiveness of NGO programs has influenced policy, usually in conjunction with one of these other strategies. In Ethiopia, for example, Pact organized visits to show education officials successful NGO non-formal education programs, both in the country and elsewhere. In Malawi, Save the Children and the Malawi Institute of Education conducted research on instruction in local languages to inform the policy debate on this issue. However, these demonstrations can backfire if not presented diplomatically, as a government can get defensive if NGO success is contrasted too starkly with government failure.

Partnership: NGOs have actively sought partnerships in which they and the government pursue complementary activities to achieve a common goal. In Guinea, Plan International makes grants to local governments to support decentralization and meet local education and health needs. Partnerships elsewhere have addressed other policy concerns. Yet, because NGOs finance these partnerships, the term has invariably meant the transfer of resources from NGOs to government.

Public opinion campaigns: Public pressure on government officials, through the media, organized rallies, and other tactics, are not common in the four countries studied, mainly because it has not been shown to change policy. The exception is Malawi, where one of the first actions of the coalition of NGOs and other groups was to criticize the government in the press.

Although they have found no tried-and-true recipe, NGOs have learned that they have a better chance of success if their policy goals are well defined and they devote sufficient resources to affect education policy. They recognize the power of having multiple stakeholders behind them—but also the balancing act sometimes required in maintaining relations with too broad or diverse a group. Finally, each situation being unique, they have learned to analyze each situation before determining a course of action. The study shows that there are some lessons learned from past and current strategies to influence education policy.

Consider This

- NGOs need to develop a recognized policy competency. NGOs need to acquire an improved capacity to understand the process of policy formation and implementation. With such a solid understanding they will be able to play an effective role in education policy in support of national education goals.

- NGOs need to have well defined policy goals that are shared and understood by all actors to achieve policy change in support of successful education innovations.

- NGOs and government need to work together to define their role in education policy. They need to identify partnership mechanisms so that policy process becomes a common strategy to achieve successful policy formation and implementation. One strategy could be to incorporate NGO education data into the national education management systems to increase information fed into policy formation.

- NGOs can be an effective conduit for local voices to be heard and have an influence on the policy process. Public participation and advocacy for education need to be strengthened by all partners, international NGOs, government, donors and private sector, at the regional and national levels, to ensure all the voices are considered in the policy formation process.

- NGOs need to nurture and maintain relationships with different stakeholders. Although confrontation may have its place, most successful endeavors reviewed have depended on developing mechanisms to link stakeholders with policy actors. Neglected stakeholders such as teachers unions can undermine policies that have resulted from a process in which they have not been involved.

- Funding partners need to allocate resources to influence the policy process. Successful education policy cannot be accomplished inexpensively. Strategies that can affect policy have significant costs.

Fundamentally, the question is no longer whether NGOs should play a role in the education sector, but how NGOs are most likely to fulfill their promise to improve the quality, equity, accountability, and pertinence of education in African countries.

These briefs summarize study findings on how NGOs have become involved in the education sector: how their presence and relationships with governments and donor partners evolved, what implications their presence has caused for educational systems and civil society, and which contextual factors have affected NGOs' interventions. The briefs review four major areas of NGO involvement in the education sector: the relationship between NGOs and government; the role of NGOs in education policy; the relationship between NGOs and donors; and the influence of NGOs on civil society.

L'heure n'est plus à se demander si les ONG ont oui ou non un rôle à jouer dans le secteur de l'éducation mais il s'agit plutôt de savoir comment elles sauront le mieux tenir leur promesse d'améliorer la qualité, l'équité et la pertinence de l'éducation en Afrique.

Les résumés présentés ici synthétisent les résultats de l'étude sur le rôle que les ONG jouent dans le secteur de l'éducation. Ils analysent l'évolution des relations des ONG avec les gouvernements et les bailleurs de fonds, les implications des interventions des ONG au niveau des systèmes éducatifs et de la société civile ; ils examinent enfin les facteurs contextuels ayant influencé les programmes des ONG. L'étude circonscrit 4 axes principaux : les relations entre les ONG et le gouvernement, l'influence des ONG sur les politiques éducatives, la relation entre les ONG et les bailleurs de fonds et l'influence des ONG sur la société civile.

PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION

Key Findings on the Role of NGOs in Basic Education in Africa

PARTENARIATS EN EDUCATION

Résultats de l'étude sur le rôle des ONG en éducation de base en Afrique

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